

Filth, blood, disease, desolation — death. No descriptors can fully capture the deplorable conditions to which some of Kentucky's animals have been subjected.

From so-called county shelters and personal rescue kennels to gambling rings where animal mutilation is sought for sport, and careless or overwhelmed farmers with degenerating livestock — the treatment of Kentucky's animal population and the laws that govern that treatment present numerous challenges to law enforcement officers across the state.

#### CRIMINAL ENTERTAINMENT

Some cases of animal abuse become national news, and they spark awareness and spur the public into action. Cases like the 2007 indictment of NFL Quarterback Michael Vick for extreme cruelty to dogs and running a dog fighting operation named Bad Newz Kennels in Virginia, bring animal abuse issues to the forefront and expose acts that happen every day throughout the United States. In addition to the more than 50 scarred, injured and underfed dogs; blood stained fighting areas; and performance enhancing drugs police found on Vick's property, he was also held responsible for killing dogs that didn't perform well in fights. A U.S. Department of Agriculture investigator provided more details on the April 2007 killings, saying that the men hung approximately three dogs "by placing a nylon cord over a 2 by 4 that was nailed to two trees located next to [a] big shed. They also drowned approximately three dogs by putting the dogs' heads in a five gallon bucket of water," the search warrant described. They also killed

one dog by "slamming it to the ground several times before it died, breaking the dog's back or neck."

In Vick's case, like many animal fighting cases, the clandestine operation went undetected until law enforcement discovered it while investigating another crime.

Kentucky's animal fighting laws fall under the cruelty to animals statutes in KRS 525.125 and 525.130. However, it is the wording of these statutes that make it complicated when law enforcement officers discover other types of animal-fighting organizations. Across Kentucky, cockfighting rings and communities that support the events are prevalent. Over the past several years, numerous busts have been made on cockfighting rings across the state.

In Montgomery County, Kentucky State Police raided the 700-seat arena formerly named Spring Brook Farm in April 2005, charging the owners with running a criminal syndicate and citing more than 500 spectators with animal cruelty. According to news reports, the arena was built in 1992 and operated for years with the knowledge of many in and around the area. The arena attracted hundreds of out-of-town visitors, and the business it brought into the area was a huge boost to the local economy in Jeffersonville, a town of only about 2,000 residents. It was said that motel rooms, restaurants and gas stations experienced booming business anytime there was an event at the Spring Brook Farm.

After KSP raided the establishment, District Judge William Lane threw out the charges against the more than 500 spectators, saying the animal-cruelty law was unclear.

KRS 525.125 says a person is "guilty of cruelty to animals in the first degree whenever a four-legged animal is caused to fight for pleasure or profit." KRS 525.130 states a person is "guilty of cruelty to animals in the second degree when ... he intentionally or wantonly ... participates other than as provided in KRS 525.125 in causing [any animal] to fight for pleasure or profit (including, but not limited to being a spectator or vendor at an event where a four-legged animal is caused to fight for pleasure or profit), mutilation, beating, torturing any animal other than a dog or cat." >>

## Animal Abuse: A Precursor to Domestic Violence?

Studies say animal abusers are likely to commit domestic violence and other violent crimes. Police have found animal abuse is a better predictor of whether someone will commit sexual assault than previous convictions for murder or arson.\*

- 70 percent of animal abusers were found in one 20-year study to have then committed other crimes, and 44 percent went on to harm people.
- 99 percent of animal abusers had convictions for other crimes.
- 100 percent of people who committed sexual homicide had abused animals.
- 61.5 percent of animal abusers had assaulted a human as well.
- 63.3 percent of inmates in one prison study who were in for violent crimes admitted to abusing animals. This doesn't include the ones who didn't admit it.
- 71 percent of women in a battered women's shelter reported their abuser either abused a household pet or threatened to abuse a pet.
- 88 percent of child abusers also abused the animals in the home. ■

\*Statistics taken from the Animal Law Coalition website at [www.animallawcoalition.com](http://www.animallawcoalition.com).